THE TOY THEATER: A CHILDREN’S PLAY-HOUSE WHERE FAIRY TALES COME TRUE:  
BY PETER NEWTON

“We know just where the fairies live and we can show you true;  
If you’ll be patient we will give the fairy lore to you.  
We know just what the fairies do, we’ve all their charms and arts,  
For fairy joys and frolics too are hid in children’s hearts.”

The theater is one of the most potent factors of our complex civilization. And yet, strange to say, until recently we have quite overlooked its most important use, its greatest opportunity for pleasure and benefit—namely, in the amusement and education of children. If we instil in the boys and girls of today a love of the beautiful and an active appreciation of that which is wholesome and pure, we may be sure that the theater of the future will reflect those ideals. Here and there we have dramatized a fairy tale like “Cinderella” or “The Sleeping Beauty;” or we have transformed into juvenile drama or picturesque tableaux some familiar Bible story or famous historical event, but these productions have been few and far between. A real theater, devoted solely to the children’s interests, is still to come.

And it is coming—soon! For a Toy Theater is shortly to appear in New York.

The playhouse is to be built in West Forty-Seventh Street, just off Fifth Avenue, and it will have a seating capacity of five hundred. As the home of dramatic entertainment for children, the Toy Theater has been designed with their ideals and aspirations and their point of view in mind. The very name suggests the mysterious and the make-believe, which all little people love. And the architects, F. Burrall Hoffman, Jr., and Harry Creghton Ingalls, have been particularly happy in their handling of the design. They seem to have caught and expressed in every detail of the decoration, the spirit of a children’s theater where
magical stories will come to life.

The street front, suggesting some Old World building in a Mediæval town, hints at the wonders to be found within. What child—or what grown-up, for that matter—could resist the inclination to enter the low portal and explore the realms of fairyland that must surely lie beyond!

The auditorium is worked out in simple Gothic columns and beams, with twelve panels depicting, in processional form, the History of Magic and fairy lore in general. On one side of the entrance there will be “The Fairy Queen,” and on the other “The Pied Piper of Hamelin,” while the curtain will show a street fair in an ancient town, with a conjuror in his booth entertaining a crowd of gaping yokels.

On the second floor will be found a tea room, for the serving of refreshments, and withdrawing rooms for patrons. These rooms, together with the playground on the roof, have been designed by Helen Speer, who has treated them in a manner wholly delightful and with a colorful con-
THE TOY THEATER

A GROUP OF BUILDINGS ON THE CHILDREN'S STREET IN NEW YORK: DESIGNED BY PETER NEWTON.
ception of design which gives them a typically childlike air.

The third floor will be used as the administrative offices, and up in the peak of the roof will be the study of the Managing Director—a high-vaulted, tapestried chamber, in Grotesque Gothic of the thirteenth century. Here on a cold winter's night, as the clock strikes twelve, one can well imagine many an elfin shape and fairy shadow scurrying from the books in which they dwell, to sit in a wide circle before the hearth and discuss with the director a forthcoming fairy play for their friends, the children. Or one can picture them scrambling up the narrow stair with him to the overhanging balcony, looking down into the shadowy corners of the study where old Stuffed Owl and Black Wooden Cat hold midnight conferences, peering into the workshop where the magical apparatus is thought out and constructed, or looking through the leaded panes at the playground bathed in moonlight, with winding path and peasant's cot and castle tall among the trees.

The theater proper will run parallel with the street at the rear of the property, which is eighty by one hundred feet. The lobby will run from the auditorium to the street and have a frontage of twenty feet. Along the front of the property and in keeping with the Toy Theater front, there will be three little five-story buildings, shown on page thirty-eight, all devoted to the interests of children.

Here will be a toy shop, a book store, a photographic studio for children, a salon for dancing classes, a hall with a stage for amateur
THE TOY THEATER

dramatic societies, and various other juvenile features. In fact, the whole property will suggest a little street in “Hamelin Town in Brunswick, by famous Hanover City”—a veritable fairyland! Beside the doorways will be funny little Noah’s Ark trees on flat stands, and on each side of the gateway to one of the shops, a wonderful red, white and black wooden soldier will be on guard—because, of course, anyone who does not believe in hobgoblins, fairies and other tiny folk cannot enter here.

Fairy lore from the mystic sagas of the Norsemen in the time of the Druids, the stories of the Arabian Nights and the fairy tales of Mediæval Europe, not to mention the classic myths of ancient Greece, have all been drawn upon in the treatment of this children’s wonderland. It will indeed be a magic spot in the great busy city—a place where all that is beautiful in childish song and verse will be visible, and where children of all ages may, like Alice down the rabbit hole, wander to their heart’s content among the things they love to read about and find them really, truly, true!

In this little Toy Theater there will be presented for the children playlets in which magic craft will work out the marvelous happenings of the fairy tales, folk lore and legends. Motion pictures of suitable sort will also be shown, so that youngsters may see those which, from an educational standpoint, will be pleasing and instructive, without having to sit through those which they should not see. There will also be plays suitable for young people who are not quite grown up, such as the adventures of Ivanhoe, William Tell, Columbus and other historical characters, as well as playlets of illusion like “The Pipes o’
Pan,” “Captain Kidd,” “Napoleon in Egypt” and “The Juggler of Touraine.”

One can imagine how eagerly the youthful audience will watch these little plays and tableaux of fact and fiction, and with what breathless suspense and childish glee they will behold the marvels of magicians, witches, elves and other wonder-folk. How happy they will be to see fairy tales come true before their eyes, to behold giants in seven-league boots striding across the landscape, tiny dwarfs hiding their treasures in some mountain cave, gallant knights rescuing fair damsels in distress, and fairy godmothers appearing at just the crucial moment with gifts of magic for some fortunate protégé! And how much more interesting and real the history books and geographies will seem, when upon the stage appear the familiar personages of the past and the picturesque people and costumes of foreign lands!

The Toy Theater will fill a definite place in the movement for the education of children along broader and more interesting lines,

and its influence for good should be very great. With this little playhouse in New York, as a center where writers, painters, musicians, conjurors and actors may all work together to produce a perfect children’s drama, the idea may very soon become widespread. The “movies” will contribute their share toward the work by reproducing for general distribution the productions of the Toy Theater.

The cornerstone of the building, which is soon to be laid, will bear an inscription dedicating it to the children of all countries and climes. For it is hoped that this little theater will prove to be the inspiration of many more Toy Theaters where the children of all peoples may gather to enjoy the tales which have come to them down through the ages—theaters where everything sweet and lovely may be instilled in their minds, that they may be the better equipped, when they too have become “grown-ups,” to keep their ideals unsullied by the grosser facts of life.